

## Vengeance

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>\* \* \* <br>

>I opened my eyes to darkness. Sheer total blackness that had surrounded me for eternity, only I couldn't see it until now. I was somewhere I didn't recognize. I couldn't even remember my own name. Those first few moments were a blur to me, a clamor of instinctive clawing for the surface, desperate to fill my lungs with air. But I didn't need to breathe anymore because I was dead. <br>

>I crawled out of the grave frightened and confused. The world was a kaleidoscope of images and scents, too much for me to comprehend. Falling to the ground, I crawled on my hands and knees, clinging to the solidity of it. I thought it would drive me mad, that first taste of the living world. Maybe it did. <br>

>Rain began to fall, cool calming water that seemed to quench the madness inside me, as if the heavens were weeping for me. Instinctively, I pulled myself up and started walking for the exit, not even realizing that I was barefoot. I remembered that graveyards were no place for a young woman to be alone at night. They were filled with nightmares and creatures of darkness. I had no idea that I was one of them now. <br>

>A strange creature stepped into view with a lion-like snarl. It looked human but its face was twisted and savage. Foolishly, I shrank back from it in fear. The vampire reacted instantly to my terror and attacked. It grabbed me by the shoulders and slammed me up against a tree, pinning me. <br>

>I jammed my eyes shut and turned my head away, but I could still see from a vantage point that was high above and descending quickly. A small black bird with a raucous caw and a steel-hard beak dropped out of the sky, pecking and scratching at the creature's face. Growling in frustration, it released me and backed away. The bird flew up into the tree branches and was gone. <br>

>Enraged, the vampire charged, its filthy hands outstretched. I knew somehow that I was much faster and stronger than this pitiful thing and that I had nothing to fear. Raising my foot, I smashed my heel into its nose. The vampire hit the ground hard, but jumped back to its feet, doubly enraged. <br>

>I began to laugh as I danced easily around its clumsy swings and sluggish lunges, spurring its anger even further. The game grew tiresome, though, and I decided to end it. Snapping my hand out, I clamped my fingers around its fist and squeezed, driving the vampire to the ground with a yelp of pain. It followed my eyes as I casually sized up a sharp protruding branch on a nearby tree and its recognized its doom was at hand. I smiled and flung the vampire hard against the branch, one handed. <br>

>The sharpened wood pierced its chest and the creature's face screwed into a pained grimace before bursting into a cloud of dust. I stared at the floating motes of ash, fascinated. I studied how they floated and turned, never seeming to come into contact with one another, despite that fact that they had once been part of a single whole. <br>

>A sharp cawing from the trees shocked me back to attention. The black-feathered bird glided by my head triggering a series of images that flitted elusively through my mind, flashes of the being I had once been. There were voices, too, reminding me of what I was here to accomplish. <br>

>"You know what it is, this thing vengeance?" a far-off voice inside my head asked, "To the modern man vengeance is a verb, an idea. Payback. One thing for another. Like commerce. Not with us. Vengeance is a living thing. It passes through generations. It commands. It kills." <br>

>I started walking, mulling over what the voice had told me. The crow followed me out of the graveyard, flying in slow, lazy spirals. I realized that the sickening double vision I was experiencing was because I was seeing out of its eyes as well as my own. Its every other sense was mine as well, and I spread my arms wide, reveling in the feel of the wind on my feathers. <br>

>It's no wonder I just wandered onto the road. The large black sedan came flying out of nowhere and slammed into me with the force of a wrecking ball. My body flew almost forty feet and smashed into the side of a brick building, crumpling nervelessly to the rough asphalt. The sedan squealed away, leaving my limp body behind in a heap. <br>

>Curious, I pushed myself to my feet. I took a few experimental steps, inspecting myself for broken bones or cuts. There wasn't even any blood. Overhead, perched on top of a streetlight, the crow squawked. Follow me, it seemed to say in a voice that was no more than a flood of feeling. <br>

>It led me to a modern school building, fluttering to a graceful landing atop the black metal fire escape. I reached overhead and grasped the cold steel and easily pulled myself up. I was stronger now, stronger than . . . what? All I could remember was the blackness, an endless nothingness. <br>

>I slipped in through an open second story window, as the bird flew a short distance and landed before a large display case made of wood and glass, containing a collection of awards and trophies dedicated

to the school's various teams over the years. <br>

>I pressed my fingers against the glass, amazed that I could not feel it. My sense of touch registered a smooth, hard resistance, but I could not FEEL anything. No emotion accompanied the sensation. I felt only cold hard tactile data. <br>

>There was something there behind the glass, something I needed to know. But what? And how? At my feet, the crow tapped incessantly at the glass with its beak. Tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap. I looked down at it and shoved my hand blindly through the pane in an explosion of glittering shards. The sound startled me and and I stared as blood ran along my fingers, fascinated by it until, before my very eyes, my wounds closed and the blood disappeared as if it had never been. <br>

>in the gap between my fingers, I saw a photograph within a little wooden frame inside the display case. Reaching inside, I picked the photo up and read the inscription at the bottom. "In Loving Memory of Miss Jennifer Calendar" it read. I looked at my reflection in the jagged teeth of glass, then to the picture and then back to the glass again. The two faces were the same. Same dark hair, same black eyes, even the same soft, white skin and shapely, pink lips. <br>

>I started to laugh, a small sound at first, barely a chuckle, but then rising into a harsh, biting sound with a resonance that would have made an opera singer envious. I wanted to stop, but the dark mirth had a life of its own, but I could only listen as it echoed down the shadowed corridors. I threw the photo aside and clapped my hands to my ears to block out the sound, but it didn't help. Sinking to my knees, I slumped back against the wall and continued to cackle madly, roaring at the irony I had discovered. My name was Jenny Calendar and I had been murdered one year ago today. <br>

>I laughed until black tears rolled out of the corners of my eyes and my voice grew tired. At last it came to an end, the brief episode of madness finally passed. Climbing back to my feet, I sauntered down the hallways with the crow perched on my shoulder, my eyes closed and my fingertips stretched out to touch the painted brick walls. I could feel something there, something that was different from the empty blackness that filled me, a far off memory that lurked just beyond my reach. It didn't matter what it was, as long as I could feel SOMETHING. <br>

>"Hello?" a man with a british accent called down the corridor, "Is anyone there?" <br>

>The voice struck a chord with me. A surge of emotion rose within me, so powerful that I stumbled. It was too powerful to comprehend, a conflicting mixture of love, hate, fear and hope that was like a storm in my head. My feathered companion took flight and I backed against the wall, pressing the palms of my hands against my face. My name is Jenny Calendar, I repeated to myself, clinging to the one shred of identity that floated in the morass of emptiness in my mind. <br>

>"I say, is anyone there?" the man's voice returned, closer now. <br>

>A dull flashlight beam cut across the corridor, illuminating a small circle wherever it touched. I watched as it inexorably wandered along the wall toward me. Run, the rush of feeling I knew to be the voice of the crow warned me, escape. But I didn't. Something inside me wanted to be discovered. <br>

>I stepped into the beam of light with my arms held out at my sides. The man holding the flashlight was tall, with short, sandy colored hair and a pair of wire rimmed glasses resting on his nose. More feeling, overwhelming yet still unidentifiable. He stared at me, stunned and I stood perfectly still watching his reaction to me. <br>

>"Jenny." He gasped, dropping his flashlight to the floor. <br>

>The cylinder broke open, bathing me with a wide beam of macabre light from below. I couldn't help but grin at him. The poor man looked like he had swallowed his tongue. <br>

>His eyes wide and unblinking, he reached out to touch me. I matched his movement, turning with him, keeping the exact measure of distance between us as when he had first moved his hand. When he stepped forward, my corresponding leg moved back. He drew his hand back and, again, I turned with him. I was a flawless mime and realized that I could keep this up forever if I chose. His eyes glued to me, he crouched to retrieve his flashlight and I mirrored him again. <br>

>"Is it really you?" he asked. From a point far behind him, I could see the back of his head and my own pale face through the eyes of the crow. <br>

>While I was distracted, his hand touched mine and the world exploded inside my head. A thousand memories rushed into my skull, racing over my synapses faster than I could comprehend them. <br>

>I was sitting behind a desk, in front of a classroom full of students. I stood and cheered amongst a throng of people at a local football game, feeling a surge of pride and exhilaration flood through me. I closed my eyes and kissed a sweet, sweet man who kissed me back just as dearly. I trembled with fear and loathing after the demon known as Igon the Sleeper left my body. I watched helplessly as an arrow from a crossbow that I had fired wedged into the back of the man I loved, almost killing him. I remembered a torrent of emotions in the span of only a moment and I thought it would destroy me. <br>

>Squeezing my hands tightly over my ears and squealing in pain, I fell to my knees. The man knelt with me and tried to put his arms around me, but contact with him only increased the surge of memories. <br>

>"Don't touch me!" I screamed, the first words to leave my throat since I had arisen, and scrambled away from him to press my back against the wall. <br>

>I watched him like a frightened animal, cowering while the memories slowly found their rightful places in my mind and settled in. The torrent had receded, for now. He crouched across from me, a million questions written on his face, but remained perfectly still and said nothing. <br>

>He had been someone close to me at one time and I wanted to stay with him, to relearn the feelings that had been stolen from me. But the crow warned me again with a wave of foreboding. There were other, more important things to relearn, debts to be repaid. I stood slowly, keeping my eyes locked on him and guarding against the chance of him touching me again. He stepped aside, dumbfounded, as I walked past him and followed the summons of my winged guardian. <br>

>"Jenny, wait . . ." he whispered, but I kept walking. He would make me want to stay, I knew, and the crow insisted that I complete the task I had been reborn for. <br>

>I kicked the outer doors, shattering the lock and throwing them wide, and exited while the crow sailed along behind me. The man followed behind me, shouting my name. The sound of his voice called to me, urged me to turn around, but I did not. I chose to ignore him, focusing instead on the echoing squawk of my guardian. He skidded to a stop and ducked into a luminescent phone booth. Punching numbers madly and holding the receiver up to his ear, I heard him reach someone on the other end. <br>

>There was something I had to do. The crow flew high overhead, and I surrendered my senses to its vantage. Looking down through its alien vision, I could see that it was leading me somewhere. I broke into a run, feeling the whistling of the wind across my face and simultaneously under my guardian's wings, and left the man behind.  
<br>

>I ran for a long time, through alleyways and down dark paths. It seemed my winged friend wished me to avoid public view. With total trust, I obeyed. When I came to a stop, I found myself in front of an old abandoned mansion with a weathered gate and boarded up windows. Shoving the gate with my foot, I broke the rusted metal and walked inside. There was a smell here, faint and old, that tickled the deep recesses of my memory. The crow landed on a window sill and peeked between the boards. <br>

>Inside, a crackling fireplace lit the room, and two people, a young man and a young woman, sat together in a tender embrace. The crow squawked and fluttered its glossy black wings as I approached the door. I knew these people, but from where? Clawing at my skull in frustration, I hovered outside the mansion for long minutes, my heart filling with directionless rage. Why couldn't I remember? <br>

>The crow cawed again, more harshly this time, and brought my attention back to the door. I followed its unspoken advice and gave the knob a sharp twist, throwing the door open and walked inside. The placid couple burst into action, the girl diving for a black kit bag against the wall while the man reached for the fireplace poker. <br>

>"Oh, my God." The slender blonde girl gaped at me stupidly, a sharpened wooden stake in her hand. I vaguely recalled great sadness that was associated with that face. I saw a flash of light and remembered what I had done to her. I saw how her lover, a vampire cursed with a feeling soul by my people, had been turned into a hate-filled animal. He had tormented her, wrenching her young, defenseless heartstrings until they bled. It had been to hurt her that he had murdered me, when he had snapped my neck like a twig and arranged my corpse like some gruesome offering on the bed of the man I loved. I remembered now, that pain. <br>

>THIS is what the crow had been telling me. This is what I was meant to do. The desire for retribution rose like a column of flame inside me, filling every fiber of my being. I spread my arms and grinned madly, feeling every cell of my body screaming in chorus, demanding only one thing with deadly clarity. Vengeance. <br>

>The vampire stepped protectively in front of the girl, holding his makeshift weapon in front of him, its tip directed at my heart. <br>

>"I've seen this before." He said, a quiver of fear in his voice. "It was a trick to try and get me to kill myself. It won't work this time." <br>

>"This is no trick, Angel." I assured him, spitting his name like a curse. "You're going to die." <br>

>Springing forward, I smashed my fist into his face and landed on top of him in front of the fire. The blonde backed away, unsure of what to do. I didn't care. I had my prey. He struggled under me, pushing at me with all his strength, but I held him. The crow floated over and landed on the mantle, lending me a fresh surge of otherworldly strength. I gripped the vampire by the wrist and pushed his hand into the roaring fire. I screamed ecstatically as I relished the sounds of his screams and sizzling flesh while ignoring my own short lived pain as my flesh healed almost instantly. <br>

>Something hard and sharp connected solidly with my temple and I was stunned. My killer rolled me off him and jumped to his feet, cradling

his smoking limb to his chest. The blonde girl held the fireplace poker, trembling, in her small hand. <br>  
>"What are you?" she asked me, her eyes wide with fear and anxiety.  
<br>

>I ignored her and fixed my murderer with a withering glare. <br>

>"I am Vengeance!" <br>

>Jumping forward, I caught the end of the poker across the face. Irritated, I reached out and offhandedly ripped it from the girl's grasp. My killer backed away from me, his hands raised in defense. He knew what I was and why I had come for him. <br>

>I grinned, reveling in his fear, tasting his discomfort like it was sweet wine. He struck out at me, snapping my head from side to side with frantic blows, but I felt no pain and kept advancing on him steadily. I wanted to break his neck, the way he had broken mine. I wanted to feel his body jerk in a death spasm and then fall limp and still in my arms. He would suffer the way that I had suffered. He backed against the wall and I jammed the shaft of the poker against his neck, pushing with all my strength. <br>

>A wooden chair came down hard on my head and shattered, but I was too lost in the bloodlust to react. My eyes bored into the vampire as he struggled weakly to keep the metal shaft from crushing his throat. He knew he was going to die, but I wanted him to feel it. The girl continued to slam me ineffectually with the broken chair, first my head and then my arms, trying to break my hold on him desperately. It was the same desperation that I had felt when my killer had caught me. I had had no escape then and, now, neither did he. <br>

>Something small and sharp thumped into my side and I turned my eyes to the door. The man from the school was standing there, loading what looked like a dart into a small caliber rifle. I watched as he raised the gun and shot the dart into me, right next to where the first had hit. Releasing the metal poker with one hand, I picked out the first dart and flicked it to the floor, then followed with the second. <br>

>I looked up at him skeptically and shook my head. The tranquilizers were useless against me. <br>

>"Dear God, Jenny." He gasped, staring at me in horror, "What have you become?" <br>

>I looked into the reflective inside surface of the window glass and knew immediately what he was talking about. My face had gone from being simply pale to bone white. Blackness had gathered around my eyes, reaching down in dark streaks to almost touch the black of my lips. It was like looking into the classical mask of theatrical tragedy. <br>

>"Back away from her, Buffy." The man leveled a different gun at me, his face resolute. "Let Angel go, Jenny." <br>

>I was appalled by the suggestion and let him know it by jamming the poker hard against my killer's neck. <br>

>"I'm sorry." He apologized, closing his eyes and squeezing the trigger. There was an explosion of sparks and smoke from the end of the gun and I felt the center of my body buck sharply as the bullet ripped through my midsection. I fell to the floor, limp and in shock. <br>

>My killer ducked for the door and the crow spread its wings and raised an angry cry of protest. I slumped against the wall and started giggling again, like the time in the school. It rose uncontrollably from within me, sending a disturbing wave through the two men and the girl. They stared at me in horror. I didn't have to look down to know that the bullet hole had already disappeared. <br>

>"She's become some sort of death spirit." The man with the gun gulped fearfully, "No force on earth can stop her until she exacts her vengeance." <br>

>"We can't just let her kill him." The blonde girl cried. <br>

>"He murdered me." I stood in an instant and pointed an accusing finger at the vampire. "Now he has to pay." <br>

>"Angelus is gone." The man with the gun argued, "Angel has atoned for his crimes. Please, let him go." <br>

>I advanced on him and the end of the gun wavered in my direction. Narrowing my eyes in challenge, I took the tip of the barrel between my fingers and touched it against my forehead. <br>

>"You're right." I smiled at him. "I can't be killed. And I won't go away until my killer pays for what he's done." <br>

>"But he isn't responsible." The girl pleaded, "You can't judge him by what he did then. It's not fair." <br>

>The crow fluttered close behind me and a flash of memory filled my mind for an instant. My uncle Enyos was explaining to me why he would not help the vampire regain his soul and I had just replied with that same sentiment. "It is not justice we serve." He had said, "It is vengeance." <br>

>Vengeance. <br>

>I made a lunge for Angel and the girl reacted, quick and desperate. Grabbing the gun, she planted the barrel in my stomach and fired. The shot threw me back, but the pain dissipated instantly. She fired another shot, and another, hoping that somehow, it would stop me. I spread my arms and giggled, my body jerking wildly whenever a bullet slammed into me. <br>

>The crow squawked shrilly and pain blossomed like a tiny sun across my shoulder and I screamed, falling to the floor. I had no idea what had happened. No bullet had hit me there, but the crow spiraled about on the floor with one wing cocked in the air. <br>

>The girl wrestled with the gun, its firing mechanism jammed. I jumped forward and ripped the weapon out of her hands and whirled it around, clipping her under the chin and knocking her to the ground. My killer and the other man struggled to protect her. I punched the murderer in the throat, dropping him, and snapped a kick into the other man's stomach. <br>

>I looked into my killer's eyes as I very deliberately unjammed the firing mechanism on the gun and pressed the barrel under the girl's chin. Both men froze, knowing not to try and stop me. One false move by any of them and she would be dead. Vengeance is a living thing, the memories sang in my mind. <br>

>"I want you to watch her die. I want you to feel the pain that MY love did." I pressed the gun hard enough against her jaw to force her head against the floor, pinning her. <br>

>"Jenny, don't do this." The man from the school begged me, "Buffy is innocent." <br>

>It is not justice we serve. It is vengeance. The words echoed in my mind. Vengeance. It commands. It kills. <br>

>But what of justice, then? I asked myself. The crow squawked piteously and hopped up onto the window sill. Its wing was bleeding and, distantly, I realized that so was my arm. The crow. As long as the crow was alive then so would I be. <br>

>I looked back to the man I had seen in the school and he watched me, his face filled with misery. He felt sorry for me. The girl under the barrel of the gun was on the edge of tears, she was so frightened, but her fear was for her lover, not herself. Angel, the vampire who had murdered me, the one who had sent me to my grave, regarded me with guilt-ridden eyes. I could see that he was wondering just how

much guilt he could handle. <br>

>Vengeance had already been served. But what of justice? Again there was a tug of conscience within me. Vengeance, I was sworn to serve, raised from the dead to serve. I jammed the gun against the soft underside of the girl's chin, my finger quivering on the trigger. If she died, then he would suffer. I could splatter her brains across the floor and he would weep and ache and die inside. <br>

>But he was already suffering, he had been since the moment he had regained his soul and would continue to do so until the day he died. Was this justice? <br>

>My body shook with inner turmoil and the three were transfixed, watching me. The man, Rupert was his name, begged me with his eyes to end this. He was the one I had thrown it all away for the first time. I snarled and shook with frustration, my heart at war with the primal force that had revived me. <br>

>There was only one solution. Turning the gun around, I quickly took aim and fired. I felt blinding agony as the small caliber bullet ripped through the body of the crow. I collapsed and the gun clattered from my spasming grip, my legs powerless and my body without feeling below the waist. The crow squirmed about, dying, and I felt myself going with it. <br>

>Rupert knelt by my side and cradled my head. There were no wounds on my body, but I lay dying in his arms. He whispered a steady stream of comforting words to me, but I could only hear him distantly. <br>

>"I'm so sorry, " he was saying, rocking me back and forth, "I wish you could have stayed. I love you so much." <br>

>I tried to reply, to put my feelings into words for him to hear, but my body was just too weak. I wanted to tell him that I loved him too, but that this was meant to be. I had no place with the living anymore. I closed my eyes and let the cold hands of death take me for the second and final time.<br>

>This time vengeance was denied and justice got its due. <br>

> <p><p>

End  
file.